Big Data Analytics

What it is and why it matters

Big data analytics examines large amounts of data to uncover hidden patterns, correlations and other insights. With today's technology, it's possible to analyze your data and get answers from it almost immediately – an effort that's slower and less efficient with more traditional business intelligence solutions.

History and evolution of big data analytics

The concept of big data has been around for years; most organizations now understand that if they capture all the data that streams into their businesses, they can apply analytics and get significant value from it. But even in the 1950s, decades before anyone uttered the term "big data," businesses were using basic analytics (essentially numbers in a spreadsheet that were manually examined) to uncover insights and trends.

The new benefits that big data analytics brings to the table, however, are speed and efficiency. Whereas a few years ago a business would have gathered information, run analytics and unearthed information that could be used for future decisions, today that business can identify insights for immediate decisions. The ability to work faster – and stay agile – gives organizations a competitive edge they didn't have before.

Big data analytics helps organizations harness their data and use it to identify new opportunities. That, in turn, leads to smarter business moves, more efficient operations, higher profits and happier customers. In his report *Big Data in Big Companies*, IIA Director of Research Tom Davenport interviewed more than 50 businesses to understand how they used big data. He found they got value in the following ways:

Cost reduction. Big data technologies such as Hadoop and cloud-based analytics bring significant cost advantages when it comes to storing large amounts of data – plus they can identify more efficient ways of doing business.

Faster, better decision making. With the speed of Hadoop and in-memory analytics, combined with the ability to analyze new sources of data, businesses are able to analyze information immediately – and make decisions based on what they've learned.

New products and services. With the ability to gauge customer needs and satisfaction through analytics comes the power to give customers what they want. Davenport points out that with big data analytics, more companies are creating new products to meet customers' needs.

Who's using it?

Think of a business that relies on quick, agile decisions to stay competitive, and most likely big data analytics is involved in making that business tick. Here's how different types of organizations might use the technology:

Life Sciences

Clinical research is a slow and expensive process, with trials failing for a variety of reasons. Advanced analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Medical Things (IoMT) unlocks the potential of improving speed and efficiency at every stage of clinical research by delivering more intelligent, automated solutions.

Banking

Financial institutions gather and access analytical insight from large volumes of unstructured data in order to make sound financial decisions. Big data analytics allows them to access the information they need when they need it, by eliminating overlapping, redundant tools and systems.

Manufacturing

For manufacturers, solving problems is nothing new. They wrestle with difficult problems on a daily basis - from complex supply chains, to motion applications, to labor constraints and equipment breakdowns. That's why big data analytics is essential in the manufacturing industry, as it has allowed competitive organizations to discover new cost saving opportunities and revenue opportunities.

Health Care

Big data is a given in the health care industry. Patient records, health plans, insurance information and other types of information can be difficult to manage – but are full of key insights once analytics are applied. That's why big data analytics technology is so important to heath care. By analyzing large amounts of information – both structured and unstructured – quickly, health care providers can provide lifesaving

Government	Retail
Certain government agencies face a big challenge: tighten the budget without compromising quality or productivity. This is particularly troublesome with law enforcement agencies, which are struggling to keep crime rates down with relatively scarce resources. And that's why many agencies use big data analytics; the technology streamlines operations while giving the agency a more holistic view of criminal activity.	Customer service has evolved in the past several years, as savvier shoppers expect retailers to understand exactly what they need, when they need it. Big data analytics technology helps retailers meet those demands. Armed with endless amounts of data from customer loyalty programs, buying habits and other sources, retailers not only have an in-depth understanding of their customers, they can also predict trends, recommend new products – and boost profitability.

Learn More About Industries Using This Technology

From the white paper *Beyond the Hype: The Hard Work Behind Analytics Success*

Advanced analytics helps Rogers Communications become more customer-centric

Rogers Communications is striving to enhance customer satisfaction and preserve its leadership in Canada's media and telecommunications sector.
Learn how advanced analytics helped Rogers Communication cut down customer complaints in half by delivering customers the right service at the right time.

There's no single technology that encompasses big data analytics. Of course, there's advanced analytics that can be applied to big data, but in reality several types of technology work together to help you get the most value from your information. Here are the biggest players:

Machine Learning. Machine learning, a specific subset of AI that trains a machine how to learn, makes it possible to quickly and automatically produce models that can analyze bigger, more complex data and deliver faster, more accurate results – even on a very large scale. And by building precise models, an organization has a better chance of identifying profitable opportunities – or avoiding unknown risks.

Data management. Data needs to be high quality and well-governed before it can be reliably analyzed. With data constantly flowing in and out of an organization, it's important to establish repeatable processes to build and maintain standards for data quality. Once data is reliable, organizations should establish a master data management program that gets the entire enterprise on the same page.

Data mining. Data mining technology helps you examine large amounts of data to discover patterns in the data – and this information can be used for further analysis to help answer complex business questions. With data mining software, you can sift through all the chaotic and repetitive noise in data, pinpoint what's relevant, use that information to assess likely outcomes, and then accelerate the pace of making informed decisions.

Hadoop. This open source software framework can store large amounts of data and run applications on clusters of commodity hardware. It has become a key technology to doing business due to the constant increase of data volumes and varieties, and its distributed computing model processes big data fast. An additional benefit is that Hadoop's open source framework is free and uses commodity hardware to store large quantities of data.

In-memory analytics. By analyzing data from system memory (instead of from your hard disk drive), you can derive immediate insights from your data and act on them quickly. This technology is able to remove data prep and analytical processing latencies to test new scenarios and create models; it's not only an easy way for organizations to stay agile and make better business decisions, it also enables them to run iterative and interactive analytics scenarios.

Predictive analytics. Predictive analytics technology uses data, statistical algorithms and machine-learning techniques to identify the likelihood of future outcomes based on historical data. It's all about providing a best assessment on what will happen in the future, so organizations can feel more confident that they're making the best possible business decision. Some of the most common applications of predictive analytics include fraud detection, risk, operations and marketing.

Text mining. With text mining technology, you can analyze text data from the web, comment fields, books and other text-based sources to uncover insights you hadn't noticed before. Text mining uses machine learning or natural language processing technology to comb through documents – emails, blogs, Twitter feeds, surveys, competitive intelligence and more – to help you analyze large amounts of information and discover new topics and term relationships.